DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 220 FL 001 526

AUTHOR SUTHER, JUDITH D.
TITLE ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING.
INSTITUTION TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, NASHVILLE.
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 3P.
JOURNAL CIT TENNESSEE FOREIGN LANGUAGE BULLETIN; V16 N2 P28-30 WINTER 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
DESCRIPTORS ACHIEVEMENT NEED, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, *AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, *EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLINES, *INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE SKILLS, LINGUISTICS, LITERATURE, MENTAL DEVELOPMENT, MODERN LANGUAGES, *SECONDARY SCHOOLS, *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, SPEECH SKILLS

ABSTRACT

IN AN ATTACK ON THE CURRENT ORAL-AURAL APPROACH TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL, THE AUTHOR LAMENTS THE LOSS OF INTELLECTUAL INVOLVEMENT ON THE PART OF THE STUDENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS. RESULTANT LIMITATIONS IN STUDENT PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS ARE OBSERVED. A SET OF OBJECTIVES IS SUGGESTED WHICH WILL SUIT THE NEEDS OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO PURSUE LANGUAGE STUDY BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY COURSES AND WILL ALSO PROVIDE TERMINAL USE FOR THE NON-SPECIALIST. (RL)

From: Tennessee Foreign Language Bulletin
No. 48, Vol. XVI, 2, Winter, 1969

ED036220

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING

by
JUDITH D. SUTHER

FL001 526

For more than two decades, theorists and experimenters in language learning have relied with increasing confidence on variations of the audio-lingual method. In order that students of modern foreign languages might undergo the nearest possible approximation of foreign exposure, pioneers in applied audio-lingual studies have devised structural textbooks and related teaching and laboratory materials designed to train not only the eye and the mind, but the tongue and the ear as well. Ideally, the student will emerge from the carefully controlled incubator of the classroom and the language laboratory to find himself at least nominally competent in all four language skills. Contrary to his counterpart in his parents' generation, he will not have been subjected to the deadening tasks of systematically memorizing linguistic peculiarities called idioms or of digesting reams of rules which do not apply in many cases and whose exceptions in turn had to be learned. With a new generation of students emerging whose total language training has been audio-lingual, college and university teachers of language and literature are naturally anxious to assess their students' preparation for more advanced study and for retaining some meaningful benefit from what they have been taught.

What has become increasingly evident in this assessment is the limited effectiveness of present teaching methods. While students now entering college-level language and literature courses bring higher oral and aural competence than their predecessors who were taught by traditional principle-first, practice-later techniques, their new brand of facility is rarely accompanied by reading comprehension or by accuracy of expression on topics outside the immediate classroom situation. While the average student may be able to digress with a certain fluency on the physical characteristics and position of all the objects in the room and outside the window and on standard socio-cultural information about the country whose language he is studying, even the above average student would be hard pressed to explain the mechanics of what he is saying. To read with precision any non-structured material requiring distinctions among tense and a grasp of nuances of meaning is too often beyond his ken.

In the process of his language training, the student has been skillfully deprived of the slow revelation of what language is all about.[1] He constructs reasonably accurate sentences and understands an appreciable amount of what is said to him, but the manipulation of his learning process has been so successful that he is no longer curious to inquire into the ways and hows of the language he is assimilating so painlessly. Any comparion or contrast he may make between his acquired and native languages is pure happen-stance, an undesirable practice from which he has been carefully shielded during the year or two or three of his basic language learning. As a result, he generally views language as a boring necessity of the liberal arts curriculum. In the case of the foreign language major (and there are proportionately fewer of them today than there were in the earlier decades of the century), he is, in spite of his eagerness to apply his language skills, unequipped to pursue intensive study either of a linguistic or literary nature.

This is not to suggest that the audio-lingual method and all its variations are total pedagogical failures. Indeed they are eminently successful in developing an oral-aural competence level which the student would probably not attain through more traditional methods. What the college or university teacher in foreign language departments is

now questioning is not the effectiveness of the audio-lingual approach in achieving these limited objectives. He is questioning the premise which claims that oral-aural facility is more desirable than other, more solid language skills. To equip a student primarily with the ability to speak (I do not mean to imply that he will speak with great fluency, but to emphasize that speaking will be his most highly developed active skill), whether he intends to continue for the bachelor's or a graduate degree, visit the country of his acquired language, or simply enter business or private life, is irresponsible on the part of these who shape the academic curriculum. Oral facility is the first to disappear when constant practice is no longer available; it decreases significantly after the lapse of a single month away from the training situation. The problem posed by the prevalence of the audio-lingual method, then, is twofold: first, it does not prepare the student adequately for more advanced language study, particularly the study of literature, and secondly, even for the student who leaves college after only a year or two, it develops skills which at best are tenuous and at worst, almost immediately discarded.

Not only most language study be retailored to suit the needs of those students who pursue it beyond the elementary courses (or basic requirements), it should have a plausible terminal use for the non-specialist. Without posing as utilitarians, modern foreign language teachers are nonetheless obligated to recognize that in the time allotted to acquiring the rudiments of a new language, the student simply cannot develop all four skills. The passive ability to understand the spoken is the last skill to fade after a period of non-use, but it is also the least likely to accrue significant benefit to the student. The most likely to accrue significant benefit to the potential specialist and the terminal student alike is the ability to read the language with some degree of ease and understanding. This is precisely what most students cannot do. Their training has afforded them the *hors d'oeuvre* and the dessert rather than the meat of linguistic competence.

We talk a great deal about the necessity of teaching students to think. We lament, and justifiably, that they are products of a culture which rewards its boxers and comedians and relegates its poets and philosophers to the ranks of the unsung and underpaid. Yet in one of the disciplines which has in the past been a rich source of serious study, yielding sharp insights into human nature and coveted pictures of how the other side lives — the discipline of the foreign language — we have placed off limits those areas which have afforded such richness. We encourage the student to "think in French" or in whatever language he is learning, but what he thinks is an automatic subjunctive substitution instead of an idea. In the past, any subject was considered worthy of study, provided it was interesting to the one pursuing it; modern languages, in their present guise, stretch even the most willing imagination that tries to find them interesting. They are stimulating to the glands because they require intense physical participation, but sense and sensibility are left cheated. By encouraging intellectual immaturity and game-playing in the study of foreign languages, we are encouraging that which we deplore — stultifying of curiosity and retardation of vigorous academic development.

If higher education in the field of modern foreign languages is to retain its honorable position among the liberal arts, we must return to a saner view of the place of language study in the college and university curriculum — indeed, in the secondary schools as well. When we turn out students year after year who resemble nothing so much as parrots or monkeys in their language concepts and performance, we are guilty of perpetuating the fallacy of learning made easy. We are lending our energies to an unproductive philosophy, the philosophy that knowledge can be gained with a minimum of intellectual participation — thus the delusion that the processes a student used to undergo

to acquire a second or third language are now hopelessly outdated. Instead of providing today's modern language student with a short-cut to linguistic competence, we have somewhere along the line convinced him that he wants to learn to speak above all else; while we are equipping him to speak with greater speed and fluency than ever before, we are simultaniously closing him off from more valuable investigations into the nature of language. He defines language, through the fault of the learning system to which he has been subjected, simply as a medium of factual communication, like a transport tube connecting two vats, an expeditious instrument whose sole function is utilitarian. He has no intimation of the intricacy of words, no consciousness of style, no particular interest in reading anything disturbing, challenging, beautiful, or grotesque in the new language. If he concludes that language learning is an anti-intellectual pursuit, it is high time we began a reconsideration of the teaching methods that have led him to such a conclusion.

While a complete about-face is neither practicable nor desirable — certainly there are benefits to be reaped from the oral-aural approach, such as better pronunciation faster, reduction of embarrassment in using the language, occasional avoidance of interference from the student's native language — there is nothing old-fogeyish in insisting that present teaching methods are simply not preparing students to approach advanced language study intelligently or even to retain a nucleus of what they learned when they leave school. Colleges and universities are usurping the domain of Berlitz and Linguaphone and Alliance Française language courses, without offering any uniquely academic compensation for those unfashionably old-fashioned rigors they used to employ to mold language students before the era of the oral-aural monopoly. If such an eventuality — the watering-down of higher education to accommodate mass standards — is symptomatic of the anti-intellectualism of our culture, then it must be fought on the same grounds that such decadence has always been fought: those who are willing to admit the inadequacy of philosophies they have themselves supported must work for the rooting out of these inadequacies and for a solid basis on which to rebuild. We cannot expect every modern language student to revel in a first-hand acquaintance with Dante or Pascal or Goethe, nor would we hope for such homogeneity of taste. But there is little sense in doing our best to produce intellectual robots.

[1] This lamentable tendency in modern language teaching has been pointed out by Laurence W. Cor in "Humanizing Language Study," *French Review* XL (May 1967), 817-822.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 220 FL 001 526

AUTHOR SUTHER, JUDITH D.
TITLE ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING.
INSTITUTION TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, NASHVILLE.
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 3P.
JOURNAL CIT TENNESSEE FOREIGN LANGUAGE BULLETIN; V16 N2 P28-30 WINTER 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
DESCRIPTORS ACHIEVEMENT NEED, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, *AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, *EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLINES, *INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE SKILLS, LINGUISTICS, LITERATURE, MENTAL DEVELOPMENT, MODERN LANGUAGES, *SECONDARY SCHOOLS, *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, SPEECH SKILLS

ABSTRACT

IN AN ATTACK ON THE CURRENT ORAL-AURAL APPROACH TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL, THE AUTHOR LAMENTS THE LOSS OF INTELLECTUAL INVOLVEMENT ON THE PART OF THE STUDENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS. RESULTANT LIMITATIONS IN STUDENT PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS ARE OBSERVED. A SET OF OBJECTIVES IS SUGGESTED WHICH WILL SUIT THE NEEDS OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO PURSUE LANGUAGE STUDY BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY COURSES AND WILL ALSO PROVIDE TERMINAL USE FOR THE NON-SPECIALIST. (RL)

From: Tennessee Foreign Language Bulletin
No. 48, Vol. XVI, 2, Winter, 1969

ED036220

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING

by
JUDITH D. SUTHER

For more than two decades, theorists and experimenters in language learning have relied with increasing confidence on variations of the audio-lingual method. In order that students of modern foreign languages might undergo the nearest possible approximation of foreign exposure, pioneers in applied audio-lingual studies have devised structural textbooks and related teaching and laboratory materials designed to train not only the eye and the mind, but the tongue and the ear as well. Ideally, the student will emerge from the carefully controlled incubator of the classroom and the language laboratory to find himself at least nominally competent in all four language skills. Contrary to his counterpart in his parents' generation, he will not have been subjected to the deadening tasks of systematically memorizing linguistic peculiarities called idioms or of digesting reams of rules which do not apply in many cases and whose exceptions in turn had to be learned. With a new generation of students emerging whose total language training has been audio-lingual, college and university teachers of language and literature are naturally anxious to assess their students' preparation for more advanced study and for retaining some meaningful benefit from what they have been taught.

FL 001 526

What has become increasingly evident in this assessment is the limited effectiveness of present teaching methods. While students now entering college-level language and literature courses bring higher oral and aural competence than their predecessors who were taught by traditional principle-first, practice-later techniques, their new brand of facility is rarely accompanied by reading comprehension or by accuracy of expression on topics outside the immediate classroom situation. While the average student may be able to digress with a certain fluency on the physical characteristics and position of all the objects in the room and outside the window and on standard socio-cultural information about the country whose language he is studying, even the above average student would be hard pressed to explain the mechanics of what he is saying. To read with precision any non-structured material requiring distinctions among tense and a grasp of nuances of meaning is too often beyond his ken.

In the process of his language training, the student has been skillfully deprived of the slow revelation of what language is all about.[1] He constructs reasonably accurate sentences and understands an appreciable amount of what is said to him, but the manipulation of his learning process has been so successful that he is no longer curious to inquire into the ways and hows of the language he is assimilating so painlessly. Any comparion or contrast he may make between his acquired and native languages is pure happen-stance, an undesirable practice from which he has been carefully shielded during the year or two or three of his basic language learning. As a result, he generally views language as a boring necessity of the liberal arts curriculum. In the case of the foreign language major (and there are proportionately fewer of them today than there were in the earlier decades of the century), he is, in spite of his eagerness to apply his language skills, unequipped to pursue intensive study either of a linguistic or literary nature.

This is not to suggest that the audio-lingual method and all its variations are total pedagogical failures. Indeed they are eminently successful in developing an oral-aural competence level which the student would probably not attain through more traditional methods. What the college or university teacher in foreign language departments is

now questioning is not the effectiveness of the audio-lingual approach in achieving these limited objectives. He is questioning the premise which claims that oral-aural facility is more desirable than other, more solid language skills. To equip a student primarily with the ability to speak (I do not mean to imply that he will speak with great fluency, but to emphasize that speaking will be his most highly developed active skill), whether he intends to continue for the bachelor's or a graduate degree, visit the country of his acquired language, or simply enter business or private life, is irresponsible on the part of these who shape the academic curriculum. Oral facility is the first to disappear when constant practice is no longer available; it decreases significantly after the lapse of a single month away from the training situation. The problem posed by the prevalence of the audio-lingual method, then, is twofold: first, it does not prepare the student adequately for more advanced language study, particularly the study of literature, and secondly, even for the student who leaves college after only a year or two, it develops skills which at best are tenuous and at worst, almost immediately discarded.

Not only most language study be retailored to suit the needs of those students who pursue it beyond the elementary courses (or basic requirements), it should have a plausible terminal use for the non-specialist. Without posing as utilitarians, modern foreign language teachers are nonetheless obligated to recognize that in the time allotted to acquiring the rudiments of a new language, the student simply cannot develop all four skills. The passive ability to understand the spoken is the last skill to fade after a period of non-use, but it is also the least likely to accrue significant benefit to the student. The most likely to accrue significant benefit to the potential specialist and the terminal student alike is the ability to read the language with some degree of ease and understanding. This is precisely what most students cannot do. Their training has afforded them the *hors d'oeuvre* and the dessert rather than the meat of linguistic competence.

We talk a great deal about the necessity of teaching students to think. We lament, and justifiably, that they are products of a culture which rewards its boxers and comedians and relegates its poets and philosophers to the ranks of the unsung and underpaid. Yet in one of the disciplines which has in the past been a rich source of serious study, yielding sharp insights into human nature and coveted pictures of how the other side lives — the discipline of the foreign language — we have placed off limits those areas which have afforded such richness. We encourage the student to "think in French" or in whatever language he is learning, but what he thinks is an automatic subjunctive substitution instead of an idea. In the past, any subject was considered worthy of study, provided it was interesting to the one pursuing it; modern languages, in their present guise, stretch even the most willing imagination that tries to find them interesting. They are stimulating to the glands because they require intense physical participation, but sense and sensibility are left cheated. By encouraging intellectual immaturity and game-playing in the study of foreign languages, we are encouraging that which we deplore — stultifying of curiosity and retardation of vigorous academic development.

If higher education in the field of modern foreign languages is to retain its honorable position among the liberal arts, we must return to a saner view of the place of language study in the college and university curriculum — indeed, in the secondary schools as well. When we turn out students year after year who resemble nothing so much as parrots or monkeys in their language concepts and performance, we are guilty of perpetuating the fallacy of learning made easy. We are lending our energies to an unproductive philosophy, the philosophy that knowledge can be gained with a minimum of intellectual participation — thus the delusion that the processes a student used to undergo

to acquire a second or third language are now hopelessly outdated. Instead of providing today's modern language student with a short-cut to linguistic competence, we have somewhere along the line convinced him that he wants to learn to speak above all else; while we are equipping him to speak with greater speed and fluency than ever before, we are simultaniously closing him off from more valuable investigations into the nature of language. He defines language, through the fault of the learning system to which he has been subjected, simply as a medium of factual communication, like a transport tube connecting two vats, an expeditious instrument whose sole function is utilitarian. He has no intimation of the intricacy of words, no consciousness of style, no particular interest in reading anything disturbing, challenging, beautiful, or grotesque in the new language. If he concludes that language learning is an anti-intellectual pursuit, it is high time we began a reconsideration of the teaching methods that have led him to such a conclusion.

While a complete about-face is neither practicable nor desirable — certainly there are benefits to be reaped from the oral-aural approach, such as better pronunciation faster, reduction of embarrassment in using the language, occasional avoidance of interference from the student's native language — there is nothing old-fogeyish in insisting that present teaching methods are simply not preparing students to approach advanced language study intelligently or even to retain a nucleus of what they learned when they leave school. Colleges and universities are usurping the domain of Berlitz and Linguaphone and Alliance Française language courses, without offering any uniquely academic compensation for those unfashionably old-fashioned rigors they used to employ to mold language students before the era of the oral-aural monopoly. If such an eventuality — the watering-down of higher education to accommodate mass standards — is symptomatic of the anti-intellectualism of our culture, then it must be fought on the same grounds that such decadence has always been fought: those who are willing to admit the inadequacy of philosophies they have themselves supported must work for the rooting out of these inadequacies and for a solid basis on which to rebuild. We cannot expect every modern language student to revel in a first-hand acquaintance with Dante or Pascal or Goethe, nor would we hope for such homogeneity of taste. But there is little sense in doing our best to produce intellectual robots.

[1] This lamentable tendency in modern language teaching has been pointed out by Laurence W. Cor in "Humanizing Language Study," *French Review* XL (May 1967), 817-822.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.